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The FBI Nabs a Would-Be Spy

Since Jimmy Carter first revealed it to the world in 1980, the development of a radar-evading Stealth bomber has become a top priority for U.S. defense planners—and a tempting target for Soviet espionage agents. Last week the FBI announced the arrest of a Brooklyn-born assistant engineer at a Northrop Corp. plant in Pico Rivera, Calif., for allegedly trying to peddle some of the firm's research to the Russians. Included were manuals, blueprints and drawings stolen from Northrop's Stealth-development program—a potpourri of secret data the loss of which, said FBI Director William Webster, could cause "irreparable damage" to the national interest.

In fact, the stolen research wasn't really the most high-powered stuff—and the

would-be spy, Thomas Patrick Cavanagh, 40, never did pass it on to the Russians. As government sources told it, Cavanagh was only a money-hungry amateur in the espionage game, and he made a fundamental blunder at the start. The mistake was telephoning the Soviet Consulate in San Francisco to offer his secrets for sale; the call was monitored by an FBI counterintelligence team, which quickly set up a "sting."

Handcuffs: Two FBI agents were assigned to masquerade as Soviet spies, and on Dec. 10 they met Cavanagh at a bar in Hawthorne, Calif. Cavanagh, identifying himself as "Mr. Peters," told the G-men he wanted \$25,000 in cash. "It's that simple," Cavanagh allegedly said. "You get the cash, I give you the information." At a second meeting two days later, Cavanagh nervously described his attempts to evade surveillance, displayed samples of his wares and again pressed the counterfeit spies for money. "You have to understand my position," he said, according to an FBI affidavit. "I feel like I can bring more documents out [but] I gotta have money, OK?" On Dec. 18 he kept his promise, turning over classified documents to the FBI agents at a Los Angeles-area hotel in return for \$25,000. After Cavanagh counted the money, the agents pulled out their handcuffs and arrested him on the spot—and found a loaded .45-caliber handgun in his briefcase.

Cavanagh, who was separated from his wife and living with a girlfriend in suburban Los Angeles, told the FBI that he was having financial problems. He now faces a mountain of legal expenses as well. If convicted, in a prosecution built on videotaped evidence, he could go to prison for life.

